

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

February 4, 2013

New Details From Player On Guy-Perkins' Basketball Brawl (KARK, Channel 4)

Players on the team said they watched as the adults got too wrapped up in that game and turned violent.

The mayor of the small Arkansas town said charges could soon be filed after the review surveillance video from the brawl Monday to see who, if anyone, will be charged.

Freshman Dalton Watkins says from where he watched on the court, it was an adult in the stands who started the fight by running onto the court and trying to attack the players.

"As soon as Rumer hit the three and won the game," Watkins said. "Tension had already been building then all the sudden you just saw a guy go over and try and hit Justin and Dustin."

Watkins said he's never seen anything like the fight that broke out Friday during a game with South side Bee Branch.

Around 20 adults got caught up in the brawl, but there were no serious injuries reported.

Watkins said the adults set a bad example for the students that night, "If the basketball players can keep it together the adults should be able to too," he said.

There is video of the brawl but the superintendent for the Guy-Perkins school district said that, along with the official incident report, will be released Monday.

Educator Spotlight (Paragould Daily Press)

Charity Andrews, a fourth grade literacy teacher, has been roaming the halls of Greene County Tech for most of her life.

"I've been an Eagle since I was five," Andrews said. "I bleed green and gold. This is home."

She is married to Jason Andrews, a farmer in Lawrence County, and they have three daughters.

"I tell everyone I have three children at home and 50 children at school," Andrews said. "My favorite part of teaching is getting to know the ladies and making their strengths and weaknesses better."

After graduating from Greene County Tech, she went to Crowley's Ridge College where she received her associate's. She finished her bachelor's in education at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro in 2003. She has spent her entire 9-year teaching career at GCT.

"She creates activities and lessons that are fun and educational for the kids," said Kathy Foss, fourth grade literacy teacher.

Andrews said an important part of her classroom time was spent on having children perform in front of others in poetry slams and classroom plays.

"I want them to have good self-esteem so they can get up in front of anyone and get out of their shells," Andrews said. "Reading is a confidence thing. I want them to be prepared for fifth grade. I don't want them to be where they were when they came to me."

Andrews also encourages silent reading times during her class periods.

"They love her," said April Bowen, fourth grade math teacher. "She makes reading fun and that is what you have to do to be a teacher and make them want to learn new material. She is always upbeat and she is one of those people that if you need help, she'll do anything in her power."

Phoebe Harris, a fifth grade student who had Andrews as a teacher last year, said there was "never a dull moment in her class."

"She is very fun," Harris said. "We did a play last year and we performed it in front of the whole grade. It was called 'Beauty is a Beast.' I probably liked it because I played Beauty."

Harris also said her literacy skills improved through Andrews' class.

"We read every night except on the weekends, and it pushed us to do our best," Harris said.

Keith Davis, assistant principal at GCT Intermediate, said Andrews made her students better because of her high standards for them.

"She has high expectations for every child in the classroom," Davis said. "No matter what educational level they are on, she still has high expectations for everyone in her classes. When you expect students to have those high expectations, they will be ready to progress to the next level."

State teacher fund to vote on steel-mill investment (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — Trustees of the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System are to vote on a proposal to invest \$60 million in a steel mill that is planned in Osceola.

System Director George Hopkins says his staff and a consultant spent six months researching the project before Monday's expected vote. Hopkins says the project appears sound and could generate a 40 percent return for the fund within five years.

The \$60 million investment, if it happens, represents about one-half of 1 percent of the fund's \$12.25 billion balance.

Gov. Mike Beebe announced the \$1 billion Big River Steel mill last week. The project needs the Legislature to sign off on a \$125 million loan.

The Teacher Retirement System investment is contingent on the loan being approved and regulatory hurdles being cleared.

Schools take look at crisis plans (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

LITTLE ROCK — School officials across Northwest Arkansas continue to evaluate crisis plans a little more than a month after a heavily armed gunman killed 20 first-graders and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn.

The gunman reportedly forced his way into the building, defeating an intercom system that required visitors to be buzzed into the building.

“It causes you to really look and investigate what your plans are,” said Jim Ford, superintendent of the 1,900-student Ozark School District in Franklin County. “Before this happened, I felt like we were very proactive.”

School district administrators report that they are checking exterior doors, to make sure all but the main entrances are locked during the school day. In some districts, only the main entrance is unlocked at elementary, middle and junior high schools, but the rules are different for high schools with multiple buildings.

Districts have assembled safety committees to study options for bolstering security.

A free seminar Feb. 20 in Fort Smith will assist districts in preventing and responding to emergencies in school. The seminar is being organized by Conner Eldridge, U.S. attorney for the Western District of Arkansas, and Bill Hollenbeck, Sebastian County sheriff.

The seminar will assist districts with their security and crisis plans, said Joyce Snow, assistant to Eldridge.

“Some of the schools are so small they don’t have as many choices for resources,” Snow said. “They’re trying to acquaint them with the law enforcement so they can put together a plan.”

Since the Sandy Hook shooting in December, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Western District of Arkansas has reached out to at least 25 school districts. Officials from the office were interested in learning about the security and crisis plans and offered strategies for schools and offered suggestions for improving security. Suggestions included updating windows to make them resistant to bullets and “buzz-in” systems at front entrances.

Schools with buzz-in systems would lock their main entrances. Visitors would use an intercom outside the building to identify themselves. An office assistant could view the visitor with a camera and would have a way to unlock the door from the office for the visitor .

The Preparing Your School for a Crisis seminar will begin at 8 a.m. at the Fort Smith Convention Center.

The seminar is free and is intended for law enforcement, school administrators and school security personnel. Registration is due by Feb. 18 to Arkansas Safe Schools at the U.S. Attorney’s Office in the Western District of Arkansas. Information is available through the U.S. Attorney’s Office at (479) 783-5125, usaarw.safeschools@usdoj.gov or through the Sebastian County Sheriff’s Office at (479) 783-1051.

In Ozark, Ford said he had confidence in the district’s plan for emergencies and said the district tests the plan regularly with students. Since the Sandy Hook shooting, school administrators in Ozark have considered changing how they schedule drills, including conducting some drills during recess or lunch.

A recent emergency drill during lunch created a greater sense of urgency over an irritation that turned out to be a safety concern, Ford said.

A new phone system had replaced an older public announcement system at the school, but the volume of the speakers in the cafeteria was too low. Cafeteria workers couldn't hear the announcement during the drill, he said.

Ford said the district aims to balance the need to plan for emergencies without distracting children from learning.

"We want our schools to be a happy, safe place where education is No. 1," he said. "We don't want to do so much of that that they're nervous all the time."

Ozark school officials are considering adding surveillance equipment, making exterior glass doors and windows shatter-proof and pricing buzz-in systems, Ford said.

"We're satisfied with the amount of training we're putting on with our teachers," Ford said. "Our teachers are very diligent about keeping their [classroom] doors locked."

A safety committee started meeting on Jan. 2 to develop recommendations for upgrading security in the Alma School District, said Pamm Treece, director of student services for the district of 3,360 students in Crawford County.

"There wasn't a school in the nation that was ready for what happened at Sandy Hook," Treece said. "We're all learning and investigating."

Suggestions related to security include providing armed school resource officers on every campus instead of one for four buildings, adding more surveillance cameras and including photos on name badges of school personnel to identify clearly the employees that belong on a campus, Treece said.

The district also is studying enclosing classrooms on campuses built in the 1970s with an "open classroom concept," Treece said. Buildings with the open classroom concept have six classrooms in a wing that are divided by eight-foot storage partitions, but the partitions do not reach the ceiling and the doorways do not have doors.

Enclosing those classrooms would give each classroom a door to lock, she said.

At Sandy Hook, staff and teachers were well-trained on lock down procedures and the campus had a buzz-in system for visitors, said Ken Trump, president of a Cleveland-based National School Safety and Security Services consulting firm.

"We certainly did not get the desired result of saving all lives," he said.

But without those measures in place, more deaths could have occurred, said Trump, who has more than 25 years of experience in school security and is the author of a 1998 book *Practical School Security: Basic Guidelines for Safe and Secure Schools*.

"We're dealing with human behavior and some extreme cases where there are going to be incidents that slip through the cracks behind our best efforts," Trump said. "You do your best to prevent it, and you do your best to prepare to manage it."

Schools should give priority to training staff, students and parents on security and what to do during emergencies, Trump said.

Security equipment is useful tool for a well-trained campus.

Without training, an intercom buzz-in system would not be effective if parents were not educated on entering the building one at a time, Trump said. The security tool isn't effective if visitors let everyone behind them in the building with them when the door is unlocked.

In Fort Smith, a district crisis team, in existence since 1990, meets monthly to discuss any issues, to consider changes to the crisis response plan and to review practices at the campuses, said Randy Bridges, director of student services and coordinator of the crisis team. Each campus has a separate crisis team overseen by the district team.

Monthly meetings concerning security include discussions of current topics in school security, training for staff and problems campuses have experienced, Bridges said.

The district requires all 26 campuses to plan drills for emergency situations, the most likely to occur being a tornado or fire. One section of the emergency plan covers responding to an active shooter scenario, as in Connecticut.

In the event of an active shooter, school staff and students train to get quiet and out of sight, Bridges said. All doors are locked.

"Does that guarantee everyone's safety? No," he said. "What we want to do is to slow the person down and buy time and try to make it as difficult as possible for someone who is intent on doing harm to our children."

The district of roughly 14,050 students is in the middle of a five-year project to outfit all schools with high-definition video camera surveillance systems that range from roughly \$30,000 for an elementary school to \$90,000 for a senior high school, said Benny Gooden, Fort Smith superintendent.

Camera monitoring varies by campus, but those monitoring the cameras would include front office staff, school resource officers and principals, district spokesman Zena Featherston said.

The district is testing some ideas to improve security around the perimeter of campuses, Gooden said.

"Cameras don't prevent anything," Gooden said. "What a camera does is allow you to see if something is amiss on the campus, in the neighborhood."

Fort Smith School District relies on the vigilance of staff, he said.

A good relationship with law enforcement is another important component, Gooden said. The district splits the cost of two armed school resource officers with the Fort Smith Police Department. The officers are based at the two senior high schools.

Gooden, however, misses a program that allowed the police department to place bicycle officers in neighborhoods. The district provided those officers with a telephone and a desk inside schools in those neighborhoods.

Fort Smith police spokesman Sgt. Daniel Grubbs explained that the department placed bicycle officers in neighborhoods through federal Community Oriented Policing Services grants.

The grants are awarded for a limited time, and if the grants are not renewed, the city must pay for those additional officers with the city budget.

Budget constraints prompted the city to begin shifting those officers into patrol 2007 and 2008, Grubbs said. The city still has a federal grant that pays for two officers who work with neighborhoods.

“Schools are just a reflection of a community,” he said. “All of the problems that are in the neighborhood are in school, too.”